

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM



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DEAR MEMBER,

It is clear that the core and crux of the conflict between the Church and the authorities in the occupied countries of Europe is the upbringing of Youth. Both parties realize increasingly that what is at stake in this real and inner war is the influences which are to surround the lives of children, and through exposure to which their consciousness and character will be formed. They are aware that the power which controls that process controls the future.

THE FIGHT FOR THE FUTURE OF YOUTH

In Norway on Sunday, March 22nd, a statement was read from the pulpit in nearly all the Churches that the pastors could continue in office only if respect was shown by the government to the views of the Church on the education of youth. "Whoever forces children away from their parents," it was stated, "violates the divine right of the home. The Church cannot leave the responsibility for the nation's education to the State." A fortnight later, on Easter Sunday, practically all Norwegian clergymen announced that they were resigning their office as a protest against the attempt of the government to compel all young people between the ages of ten and eighteen to enrol in the quisling youth movements. The quisling Church authorities issued an ultimatum to the clergy to withdraw their resignations; but when the time limit expired, it was found that out of the eleven hundred clergy only two had recanted. This unexpected solidarity of the Church compelled the authorities to retreat and Bishop Berggrav has been released, though it is understood that he is under virtual house arrest.

The overwhelming majority of the teachers are on the side of the Church. The authorities have issued an ultimatum to the teachers that unless they join the quisling teachers' organization by May 1st they will be dismissed and forbidden to hold any state or municipal office in the future. Nearly all the schools throughout the country are closed owing to the refusal of the teachers to meet the requirements of the government. It is reported that 12,000 teachers have resigned and that 2,300 have been arrested and sent to concentration camps or forced labour.

The solidarity of leaders and people in Norway is evidence not only of a common determination to resist the enemy but of a democracy which is at one with itself. It is the result of a marked democratic advance which took place at the beginning of the century. For thirty years Norway has had free education, including the university, and one common school for every child under the age of twelve. The results are now being reaped, since many of the Norwegian leaders come from the hardy peasant stock.

The same issue has been one of the chief explosion points in Holland, where a recent Nazi decree threatens with dismissal teachers in Christian schools "who exert an influence on their pupils which conflicts with a favourable development of the Dutch School system," i.e. with the inculcation of Nazi ideology. The responsible leaders of the numerous Christian schools have refused to accept the new ruling, and are now in open conflict with the authorities.

The meaning of these struggles is epitomized in the message addressed by Professor Karl Barth to the Christians of Norway.

"It is your privilege," he says, "to put your faith to a test out of which, if it stands the test, it cannot but emerge stronger and purer than before. You will see and know, specially in the glorious power and light which is to be found in it at a time like this, when it ceases to be a matter of tradition and habit and becomes, as it was in the days of the fathers, a matter of obedience and daring. You are called on to make the greatest and most decisive contribution to the restoration of liberty and right in your own country. You will give us Christians in all countries a stirring, inspiring and consoling example. And, most important of all, you will be taking up your cross as humble and valiant men and entering into specially close fellowship with Him who, as Israel's Messiah, the Saviour of the whole world and head of His Church, is ruler of all principalities and powers in heaven and earth. . . .

"We are persuaded with you that nothing, whether great or small, which you are called upon to suffer will be in vain, and that it will all yield fruit for the Kingdom and Church of Jesus Christ, for your country and for the future of all."

THE CHURCH AND PERSECUTION IN THE FAR EAST

The profound problem of the relation of the Church to the State and to the community, which since the beginnings of Christianity has been one of the major issues in European history, has become acute to-day in the Far East as well as in the West. It presents itself there in simpler terms; the Churches are less inextricably involved with the social and cultural life around them. The issues are in some respects easier to understand. A paper in the small broadsheet *The Presbyterian*,¹ for March, describing the experiences of the Churches in Japan, Korea, Manchuria and China, contains matter of such interest and importance that I have asked and received permission from the editor to make it available to our readers.

The writer distinguishes three types of relations between the Church and the totalitarian state. The first is where the national sympathies of members of the Church are the same as those of the nation, as in Japan. In this case the danger for the Church is greatest. Its problem is easiest where, as in China, resistance has been offered to the invader, since the sense of independence has been awakened. But where, as in Korea, Manchuria and Formosa, there has been no organized national resistance to the conqueror, it is difficult for the Church to maintain any inner independence. It does not exist in separation from the life that surrounds it. Where that life is broken, the Church is at sea. In the collapse of the social background all questions acquire an air of unreality, in which it almost seems as if nothing really mattered.

Crisis does not come to the Church in terms of a clear-cut issue. Persecution is never the simple thing we often think it is. It is not a simple choice: confession or recantation.

"It was not like that in the days of the early Church, it is not like that in the countries under Japanese rule to-day. Those who persecute are not aiming at the suppression of Christianity. They have a positive aim. They wish to discover what people are thinking. They are specially anxious to know what such groups as remain are thinking. They wish to be sure that there are no 'dangerous thoughts.' Christians who are arrested are not arrested as Christians and do not suffer as Christians. They are arrested as subjects of whose activities the police are suspicious. Those who are arrested do not realize that they are being tried as Christians. They think, first, that there must have been a mistake. If only the police knew all about Christianity, they would realize that Christians only did good deeds. Then they are afraid that some of their fellow-Christians may have foolishly indulged in some political activities. They are not asked to recant their faith; they are not even directly questioned about their faith. The issue may seem to outsiders to be a clear-cut issue between idolatry and martyrdom. To those who face it it is never so simple. It seems concerned with lesser and less certain matters and to involve many other questions.

"If an issue is to be forced it is the Church that must choose that issue. The Church must decide where it will make its stand. And it has to do that without the possibility of frank and

¹ Robert A. Whyte, 131 Portland Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham 16. 3d. Minimum annual subscription, 4s.

full discussion. To discuss taking a stand would be to prevent the possibility of taking a stand on a religious issue. It would be to brand the Church as politically subversive. For no meeting for discussion or for worship can be held without informing the police. It is not subtle propaganda that divides the Church. The State does not have to do anything. It simply prevents the Church from meeting and leaves it to discover its own divisions and to deepen them."

The writer goes on to describe the experience of the Church in Manchuria, of which he has intimate, first-hand knowledge. It was on this Church that the crisis first fell. It had to face its ordeal, unprepared by the experiences of other Churches and unsupported by the knowledge that they were to share its sufferings. What he says is worth quoting in full :—

"The Church stood the test. Many suffered imprisonment and torture. Some died. All who made active confession of their faith went in danger of suspicion and arrest. The Church stood the test in a way that surprised those who remembered that the first convert had been baptized only some seventy years before. But the Church paid a heavy price : its share of the price paid by all who are conquered. 'Through fires that purged and perils that ennobled . . . the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.' That is true, but it is only one side of the truth. The Church pays by restricting its message, by reducing its concern for men, by learning suspicion and fear, by learning to speak in words with two meanings. It learns to profess opinions which it does not believe. It learns caution and worldly wisdom. It comes to assess its own progress in terms of its own peace and security. And that is a cost whose payment is required day by day and year by year.

"But at this almost inevitable cost the Church did survive its first ordeal. By what means did it survive ?

"The first thing we have to note is that the strength of the Church was shown as lying in the small groups of men and women who formed Churches in the towns and villages. These did not disintegrate. The Churches that were more liable to disintegrate were those of the cities, where on a Sunday there had used to be large congregations. Such 'audience' Churches did not stand the test. The strength of the smaller group lay in the fact that all the members were intimately known to each other. It was only such mutual knowledge and trust that could face the risk of constant meetings. Each knew that his life lay in the hands of his fellow-Christians. It was not an empty, not an unknown threat for a man in a moment of anger to say that he would inform the police of some fact, either imaginary or easily distorted, which would bring on someone else at least suspicion and probably arrest. Only a community that was bound closely by affection, trust and faith could survive.

"And, secondly, these Christian groups were not based on mere sociability, but on a spiritual discipline. The centre of the life of the village church was not the big Sunday morning service, but the daily prayer meeting. In every place the inner band of the faithful had always been meeting daily for prayer, for Bible reading, for fellowship. Perhaps these chapel meetings would appear to us to be dull, monotonous and narrow. But they had proved the schools of the Christian faith and life. If the Chinese Christians had regarded attendance on one service a week as sufficient training in the Christian life, the Church would have disappeared at the first breath of opposition.

"And, thirdly, behind this life of fellowship and spiritual discipline lay the over-mastering sense of the reality of God and of His Kingdom. These members of the Church might be very ignorant and very crude in their interpretations, but they never had a doubt of the objective reality of their faith. Their faith was never expressed in causes and principles and tendencies. It is this certainty that gives rise to an apocalyptic type of interpretation at such a time. It is not due merely to finding compensation for the ills of life. It is due rather to their over-mastering belief in God and His purpose for men. That belief may find its expression in visions and extravagant hopes. It may also find its expression in the willingness to do the duty to which God calls, no matter what the future may bring. For it is the belief in God's command now and His help now. It is the conviction that all that matters for men is that they be faithful. And the Church in China is filled with the record of men who have acted in that faith."

FAMINE IN GREECE

The announcement in the House of Commons last week that the British, Canadian and American Governments have declared their willingness to authorize monthly ship-

ments of 15,000 tons of wheat or flour from Canada to Greece will give much satisfaction. On the initiative of the Swedish Red Cross, negotiations have taken place with both belligerent parties. The Swedish Government are ready to make available Swedish tonnage now lying in Swedish ports for carrying out the purpose. The declaration of the Allied Governments is subject to satisfactory arrangements being made for the disposal of the imports and of Greek native produce in the interests of the Greek people. Such interim measures as are practicable have been sanctioned until the plan can be brought into effect.

THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS

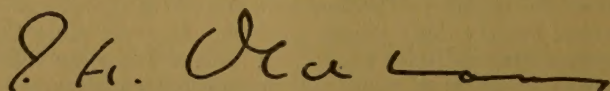
I should have assumed that most of you would have known in one way or another about *The Screwtape Letters*,¹ by C. S. Lewis, if I had not discovered in talking with friends that at least half had not heard of them. I have not much fear that, if I persuade those of you who can afford five shillings to put them into this book, you will hold it against me in the future. The letters are addressed by an elderly fiend who has attained the rank of under-secretary in the nether world to a young nephew who has recently joined the service, and contain advice on how to corrupt and lead astray human souls. Into this brilliantly original form Mr. Lewis has packed an extraordinary wealth of spiritual wisdom and counsel, and shows astonishing skill in piercing the armour of our complacency. There is scarcely a page that does not contain something memorable.

USED ENVELOPES

The response to our appeal for the return of envelopes has been generous. During the last four weeks the daily average of returned envelopes has been 700. They have come from all parts of the country in large and small bundles. Bishops and other busy people have made their contribution. One of our members, who is in a position to do so, has had a thousand new envelopes identical with those we use specially printed for us. The job of reconditioning returned envelopes by pasting labels over the address and postmark has been temporarily taken on by one of the Oxford companies of Girl Guides, who have dealt with 30,000 in three weeks.

We have been asked whether other envelopes than our own are useful. While our need for other sizes is not so great, envelopes that can take documents on foolscap and quarto paper are always welcome.

Yours sincerely,



¹ Centenary Press. 5s.

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